



What is Diabetes?

Diabetes is a disease where the body either does not make insulin, or does not properly use the insulin it does make. Insulin is important because it helps your body break down carbohydrates (or sugars) in the food you eat. When insulin is missing or not working properly, blood sugar levels can become high. This can lead to complications such as blindness, kidney failure, or even death.

1.4 million adults in the United States were diagnosed with diabetes in 2004. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the number of people with diabetes continues to rise.

Like most diseases, diabetes has a genetic influence. Having a first-degree relative (such as a parent or sibling) with diabetes increases your risk for developing the disease. While genes do not cause diabetes, certain genes do increase the chance that a person will develop diabetes. However, other things besides genes can increase or decrease your risk of diabetes. Some risk factors for diabetes include being overweight or obese and being older.

Although you cannot change your genes, you can do a few things to lower your risk of diabetes. First, know your [risk](#) for developing diabetes.

For many people, diabetes can be prevented through healthy eating and regular exercise. If you find out that you are at risk for diabetes, these are some things you can do.

- Maintain a healthy weight. If you are overweight or obese, make changes to help with weight loss.
- Exercise almost every day of the week.
- Eat a diet that is high in fruits and vegetables, lean protein, whole grains, and healthy fats.
- See your doctor regularly.

New developments in genetic testing allow doctors to look at how a person's body reacts to insulin. This test provides an opportunity for a person to learn more about their chances for getting diabetes.

For more information

To find an educational program about diabetes in your area, visit the [American Diabetes Association](#)

[Symptoms](#)

[Genetics of Diabetes](#)

For tips on staying active, visit www.INShape.IN.gov.

For more information on healthy eating, please visit mypyramid.gov, and [Indiana's Community Nutrition/Obesity Prevention](#) website.